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AUTHOR David, Larry M.
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ABSTRACT

A guide to implement, expand, or improve an extended college orientation course on campus is presented. Student success courses and extended orientation programs help students learn to be more effective in school and improve student performance and retention. These courses are sometimes designed for honors students, returning adults, athletes, undeclared majors, majors by discipline, or all entering freshmen. They do not include remedial and study skills courses. Course content generally includes academic skills, life management skills, and information pertinent to the school and community. Specific topics may include library skills, college-level reading, test-taking, creativity, wellness, institutional policy, and career planning. Potential benefits for students are identified, along with strategies for beginning or reinforcing a student success course and ways that faculty and administrators can help the course succeed. The following elements of an effective course framework are considered: the course should be credit-bearing, mandatory, and presented over time; it should contain 30 or more contact hours; and it should be well-scheduled, facilitated by top instructors, and advertised to students. Advice on what to do when people do not support the proposed changes is offered, and studies are described that provide support for the extended orientation approach. (SW)

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Gaining Faculty and Administrative Support for Student Success Courses

by
Larry M. David

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SECOND • EDITION

The purpose of this booklet is to assist you in your efforts to implement, expand, or improve an extended orientation course on your campus. It contains suggestions, techniques, and information useful in communicating about student success courses: what they are, to whom they may apply, and what results can be anticipated.

Your institution is unique—not every suggestion in this booklet will be applicable to your school. As you read, look for what you can adapt to your special situation.

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Student success courses and extended orientation programs help students learn to be more effective in school and thereby improve student performance and retention. These courses are sometimes designed and tailored for honors students, returning adults, athletes, undeclared majors, majors by discipline, or all entering freshmen. These courses go by many names, such as Student Success, College Survival, College Success, Freshman Seminar, Extended Orientation, Academic and Life Skills, Effective Student Behavior, or College Skills. Student success courses as described in this booklet do not include *remedial* courses in English, math, reading, or study skills.

Course content generally includes academic skills, life management skills, and information pertinent to the school and community. Specific topics may include goal-setting, college-level reading, time management, memory, note-taking, test-taking, stress reduction, critical thinking, creativity, library skills, communication, assertiveness, wellness, relationships, drug and alcohol issues, learning styles, community resources, campus history, the history of higher education, the value of a liberal arts education, institutional policies and procedures, financial planning, organizational skills, and career planning.

Stressing the benefits for students is an essential part of eliciting support for your course. Depending on course content, here are some of the benefits students may expect:

- difficult tasks, assignments, and papers take less time
- learning obstacles disappear
- employability is enhanced
- investment in education is more likely to pay off
- school is more enjoyable
- grades improve
- studying is more productive
- academic, career, and life goals are in focus
- anxiety level is reduced
- more hours are available for fun, work, study, or sleep
- notes are legible and useful
- inquiry skills improve
- tests are approached more skillfully
- stressful situations are easier to handle
- choice of school or major is clarified
- policies and rules that govern the institution are understood
- communication skills improve
- support groups are established
- self-confidence grows
- involvement in the educational community increases
- procrastination diminishes
- relationships improve with spouse, teachers, roommates, parents, children, etc.
- money is managed better
- campus and community resources become more familiar

Gaining **approval & support** from the individuals important to the success of your course requires preparation and communication. This support is necessary both for the workability of your course and for sustaining it over a sufficient period of time for its value to be established. Many people have found the following strategies useful for beginning or reinforcing a student success course.

- Write a purpose statement for the course. This will probably be distinct from the purpose statement presented to students. One possibility is: "The purpose of our student success course (or whatever your course is named) is to improve student performance and retention at our college." In contrast, a purpose statement appropriate to the student perspective could be "The purpose of this course is to provide an opportunity for students to learn and adopt methods to be successful at this university."
- Refer to your purpose statement whenever communicating about the course. When negotiating any aspect of your course, take care not to make compromises that will sabotage the purpose from either the institution's or the students' perspective. For example, it would be a mistake to settle for too few course contact hours.
- Seek grassroots support as well as assistance from the top of the administrative hierarchy. Draw a political road map encompassing crucial factors for gaining support and identifying key individuals. Include those

who are influential behind the scenes.

- Consider sending a proposal directly to the president and/or chief academic officer. See him or her in person about the benefits of such a course and include sample course materials in your presentation.
- Involve people from a variety of disciplines

The more people who have a vested interest in the proposal, the more likely it is to be accepted.

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and from administrative, academic, and student service sectors in the creation of the course proposal. The more people who have a vested interest in the proposal, the more likely it is to be accepted.

- Become the retention expert on your campus. Familiarize yourself with all data, research, and institutional studies related to student performance or retention at your school. It helps to be knowledgeable about orientation courses and their relationship to student success. (Refer to the publications listed near the end of this booklet.)
- Volunteer to organize a retention task force. This group can explore options your institution might use to improve student performance and reduce attrition. Include influential campus leaders, course supporters, and critics on the task force.
- Work with critics early in the decision process. Talk to people who you think will

object to your idea before they publicly speak their opposition. It is easier for critics to change their minds when they don't have to defend a past position. Also, their input is valuable and their concerns are legitimate. Hearing their point of view and including them in the development phase can result in a course better suited to student and faculty needs.

- Make requests of people who can move the process forward. An effective request contains a specific call to action and a date by which the requested action will be completed. Ask for a definite yes or no to your requests.
- Maintain perspective. The student success course you want to see in place will serve students and the institution regardless of who claims credit for the idea or its implementation. Take care not to treat the course proposal as an extension of yourself. If it is expedient to allow others to assume ownership of the course, be willing to let go of it as "your baby". Ideally the course will not "belong" to any one person; it will combine the thinking of a number of individuals.
- Take into consideration the issues and interests of the audience when promoting your course. For example, when speaking with an administrator who is concerned about the budget, discuss the positive relationship between improved retention and institutional finances.

Administrators provide key elements in support of student success courses. Ask them to contribute to the success of the course by:

- Recognizing the potential of the course and including it as an essential part of the institutional retention plan.
- Promoting the activity of the retention task force or committee. (This can include scheduling and announcing meetings, requesting members to actively participate and perform specific tasks, and setting time lines.)
- Standing behind the academic credibility of the course. (This means ensuring the course carries credit if that is within administrative control.)
- Making the course mandatory for all new students.
- Listing the course in the catalog and enrollment documents as a legitimate part of the curriculum.
- Scheduling the course in attractive time slots.
- Taking responsibility for the details of registration. (It is common for a newly-required course to falter at registration when some people are unaware that scheduling each student into the course is mandatory.)
- Ensuring that rooms and equipment are available and adequate.
- Participating as guest speakers.

- Teaching or facilitating one or more sections. (Although this may go beyond the typical show of support, it is a substantial demonstration of the administration's belief in the importance of the course. Presidents, vice presidents, and deans often make excellent teachers of a student success course. It can also enhance their relationship with students.)

- Publicly voicing their support of the course to students, faculty, and other administrators.

- Selecting instructors who care about student success. (The best teachers are those who give students an opportunity to experiment with new methods and techniques rather than merely lecturing about effective student behavior.)

When asking for these and other measures of support from administrators, emphasize course benefits that will appeal to this specific audience. You may wish to stress these and other benefits.

- Enhanced student performance as measured by grade point averages, number of courses completed per term per student, and reduced drop-out rate.

- Stronger financial position of the department and institution due to a higher number of paying customers. Cutting attrition simultaneously cuts revenue losses.

- More satisfied clients, making it easier to recruit new students.

- Improved student feedback. This course can provide a new channel for communication between students and the administration.

- More satisfied faculty. Teaching students who take responsibility for their learning may decrease faculty frustration and complaints. Students bring new learning skills to their other classes and may incidentally help their instructors become more effective.

The existence of an extended orientation course is evidence of your institution's concern for the success of its students.

- Enhanced faculty awareness about retention.
- Reduced load on counseling. Your course can head off little problems before they turn into exit interviews.
- More effective use of career counselors, tutors, substance abuse programs, and other campus resources.
- A new marketing tool for recruiting. The existence of an extended orientation course is evidence of your institution's concern for the success of its students. It can also be used as a way to ease a prospective student's anxiety about his academic skills and ability to cope with college pressures. Inform your admissions staff of the benefits of the student success course. Consider giving a copy of your course textbook to each admissions representative. Knowing the benefits and having a copy of the textbook to show to students can make his or her job easier.

Endorsement by the **faculty** is also critical to the foundation of your student success course. Faculty support may include:

- Promoting the academic credibility of the course, recognizing its credit-worthiness, and taking appropriate action, if necessary, in the faculty senate or curriculum committee in order to get the course approved.
- Providing feedback to student success course instructors about student needs and/or deficiencies. Later, faculty can provide information on how the course is influencing student behavior.
- Speaking positively about the course to students, parents, administrators, and fellow faculty members.
- Taking part in the retention task force or orientation committee.
- Being directly involved through teaching, team teaching, or facilitating one or more sections.
- Participating in the course as a guest speaker.
- Reinforcing concepts and methods introduced in the student success course while teaching in their own disciplines.
- Referring students to the course (if the course isn't mandatory).

Here are some course benefits which may be of interest to faculty.

- Teaching is more productive and enjoyable. Students are awake, active, responsible for their learning, and task-

oriented. Students learn to "teach themselves."

- Students who acquire life-long learning skills have a greater appreciation for education and for the teachers who provide an opportunity for learning.

- Improved retention results in greater revenue and higher student numbers. This, in turn, can increase demand for faculty, support improved facilities, and enhance the security of teaching positions.

Student success courses provide an unusual opportunity to interact with students on a personal level.

- More upper-division classes are available to teach due to the increased number of upperclass students.

- Faculty who volunteer to teach this course enjoy additional benefits. Student success courses provide an unusual opportunity to interact with students on a personal level. Being a part of the exciting discoveries students make and observing their changes can renew one's sense of what is possible in education.

An effective **course framework** contains several key elements. Administrators and faculty can demonstrate their support of the course by assuring that it matches the following criteria:

- ✓ **credit-bearing**
- ✓ **required for all**
- ✓ **presented over time**
- ✓ **thirty or more contact hours**
- ✓ **well-scheduled**
- ✓ **facilitated by top instructors**
- ✓ **advertised to students.**

✓ Credit-bearing

A well-designed student success course deserves full academic credit. It is the traditional unit by which educational value is measured. Credit is the reward for attendance, participation, and learning the information and skills outlined in a given course. While many courses teach skills and data that will eventually be obsolete, the learning and self-management skills developed in a student success course can serve for a lifetime.

There are several common considerations about credit that might be raised. For example, the number of credits needed for certification or graduation are limited and are already spoken for by academic departments. Or, the faculty curriculum committee decides which courses count for credit, and the chairperson views this course as "remedial". In addition, some students may say that the school requires too

many credits already.

Dealing with these and other objections requires development of a strategy. The techniques listed here have been used successfully in gaining credit for the course.

Often, a school *appears* to be prohibited from offering credit or requiring a student success course while a similar institution in the same state has a required, credit-bearing course already in place. Find out if there are state laws, accreditation rules, or school policies which may impede the effort to grant credit.

Bring the focus of conversation to the real issues underlying the need for a student success course. For example, if retention is a sufficiently serious concern, difficult obstacles can be overcome.

Get help. There are consultants and strategists available to assist you in solving your dilemmas. You may find them among your peers on campus.

Substitute the extended orientation course for another first-term course.

Extend the total number of credits required for graduation, even if they exceed state or accreditation minimums.

In some cases, holding out for academic credit may absolutely stop the process of course adoption. When this occurs, request that "transcript credit" be granted to students who complete the course. In addition to the benefit of having the course listed on their official record, the course may transfer to another institution where a similar course does carry academic credit.

✓ Required for all

Building a student success course into the core curriculum will maximize its impact on student performance and retention. All students, including the most well-prepared, can benefit enormously from this course.

In general, student success courses focus on personal and social as well as academic issues. Students with good academic histories may easily succumb to problems which have nothing to do with their academic competency. Past achievement in classroom situations is not necessarily a predictor of a student's ability to set goals, manage time, succeed in relationships, or cope with stress.

When course participation is mandated only for students testing below a certain level, the image of the course becomes "remedial" or "developmental". There are colleges with high admissions standards where student success courses are part of the first-term curriculum for all students.

If your course is not required of everyone, those who don't participate may be precisely the ones who could make the greatest contribution to the success of other students. Also, leaving them out eliminates the possibility of their modeling effective behavior to others in the course.

✓ Presented over time

Best results are obtained in a student success course when it is taught over a period of time rather than offered all at once.

Two important objectives of the course are changed behavior and adaptation of techniques.

Transference of skills is difficult when the course is presented prior to the beginning of the regular term, in a short length of time, or in isolation from other courses.

This course will be most relevant to students when they can practice newly-learned strategies in their other courses. Learning test-taking skills, for instance, is more meaningful when students are actually taking exams.

More value is derived from a student success course textbook when there is adequate time for students to complete a series of assignments. This also reduces the need for lecturing and allows more class time for experiential learning.

✓ 30 or more contact hours

Student success courses can encompass many objectives—improving academic and life skills, experimenting with new strategies, learning the rules of the institution, forming support groups, and getting acquainted with community resources. This is a long agenda. Thirty contact hours is recommended. Some courses carry 3 units of credit and run 40 hours or more. Don't compromise the success of your course by negotiating insufficient time for its delivery.

✓ Well-scheduled

Courses scheduled during regular class hours are considered legitimate by faculty and students alike. Be prepared to campaign hard to get the course scheduled properly. This is sometimes so crucial to the success of your course that it may be the last thing you will want to compromise. Any course scheduled at 4:30 on Fridays is almost doomed from the start!

✓ Top instructors

Your teachers will make or break your course. If one of your jobs is to hire or otherwise select teachers, look for the following attributes:

- trusted by students so that they will experiment with the techniques presented
- ambitious enough to invest extensive time and energy in course preparation
- respected by administrators so they will listen when the teacher speaks on behalf of students
- cares about students and their futures
- believes that each student can be successful
- represents your institution positively
- invests sufficient time and energy in course preparation
- allows students to take responsibility for themselves
- encourages and sets the stage for students to create their own solutions
- radiates energy and enthusiasm
- listens actively.

Teachers who lecture well in their academic field are not necessarily the best choice as student success instructors. A major course objective is to facilitate changes in how students approach their learning. Interactive, experiential activities more effectively promote changes in student perspectives and practices than what may be expected from a straight lecture format. These activities can include exercises, guest speakers, quizzes and evaluations, assignments, and sharing of experiences. Students are more likely to modify their behavior when they discover that a new method works better.

✓ Advertised to students

Promote the value of your student success course to students and their parents or spouses. Many people have a limited or erroneous concept of extended orientation, college survival, or freshman seminar courses. Involve course instructors, counselors, student services personnel, and others in promoting your course during campus orientation and other initial meetings. It is worth some effort even when the course is required.

Raising student expectations about the potential benefits will build enthusiasm and stimulate a greater commitment of energy to the course.

Describing the purpose and benefits provides a sense of expectation and helps to build a foundation for desired results. It may relieve anxiety for both students and those financing or otherwise invested in their success. They will see the course as something like an insurance policy designed to protect the time, energy, and money being spent on the student's education. Consider doing a mini-course for parents and spouses during orientation week. Raising student expectations about the potential benefits will build enthusiasm and stimulate a greater commitment of energy to the course.

Promoting your course can also be accomplished by preparing and supplying flyers for mailings already scheduled for recruiting, admissions, and pre-registration. Request that a

paragraph about the course benefits be included in a welcome letter from the president of the college. The course can boost public relations for your school ("We care about student success!") and serve as an excellent recruiting device.

Include high school counselors on your list of potential advocates. Educate them about the course and its benefits to students. They may then recommend your course (and your school) to prospective students.

When the going gets tough and your plans are meeting unyielding resistance, don't panic. There are always those who have a differing point of view. These suggestions may help you communicate with people who do not support the changes you advocate.

- Have clear expectations and goals. Know what you are willing to compromise and what you are not.

- Fully hear your opponents' points of view. It may help to paraphrase (to them) your understanding of their objections. Sometimes people will change their positions when they feel heard.

- Instead of attacking the views of those who disagree with your plans, make it easy for them to come to conclusions which agree with yours. Help them to discover new information which invites a shift in their perspective.

- Find out, if you can, what experiences faculty members have had which may be influencing their attitudes. They may have memories of orientation courses that were pathetic in both substance and process. At some institutions, such courses have focused very little on the process and methods of learning. More often, the content has consisted of regulations, procedures, and who holds what position at the university. With this conception of an orientation course, any educator would be skeptical.

- Survey those who are unsupportive of your proposal to discover what they think is appropriate to include in a

college survival course. Ask them to describe the particular student behaviors they find least tolerable. Modifying these behaviors can be an objective of the course.

- Sell results. Allow the continuation of the program to depend on what it will produce. When proposing your course to the curriculum committee, suggest that a research component be included in the program. Pre-select someone who is not an advocate of your course and ask for his or her commitment to monitor its impact. Let the committee know that you want to drop the course after two or three years if it proves ineffective.

Once faculty members have experienced the usefulness of these ideas in their own lives, the value of the course to students will be more apparent.

- If a required course for all freshmen is out of the question, request approval of a pilot program with a commitment to expand it when its effectiveness is demonstrated. With this commitment, the course will eventually reach its intended audience.

- Arrange to present a faculty development workshop. Use material from the course that is relevant to faculty concerns (for example, stress management, time management, and critical thinking.) Once faculty members

have experienced the usefulness of these ideas in their own lives, the value of the course to students will be more apparent.

- When all else fails, keep trying! Often perseverance is what matters in the final analysis. Take the long-term view. Don't be discouraged because your course proposal didn't make it into this year's schedule. Continue to be "the squeaky wheel". Your ideas and enthusiasm will be noticed.

Research demonstrates that providing an extended orientation course is one of the most effective strategies to support student success and improve retention rates. The studies listed here help to make the case.

- ACT National Center for Advancement of Educational Practices published a report by Aubrey Forrest entitled *Increasing Student Competence & Persistence.* This study involved 44 public and private colleges and universities from various regions of the country. The selected institutions represented a variety of student demographics and a wide range of admissions selectivity.

  The findings of this report are summarized in the form of six specific recommendations. The first begins:

> "Probably the single most important move an institution can make to increase student persistence to graduation is to ensure that students receive the guidance they need at the beginning of the journey through college to graduation. This early guidance can also assist them in acquiring the competence, through the formal general education curriculum, that they will need to complete their courses of study and function effectively after graduation.
>
> "At its best, this guidance system should include the following features:
>
> "New student orientation should continue as a formal course during the first term on campus."

This report, in booklet form, costs $4 and can be ordered from:

The ACT National Center for the Advancement of Educational Practices
2201 North Dodge Street
P.O. Box 168
Iowa City, IA 52243

- Miami-Dade Community College North Campus initiated a study to assess the effectiveness of an orientation course in reducing attrition and increasing grade point averages. The analysis was limited to students who enrolled for the first time for the Fall semester of 1985 and who planned to pursue either an A.A. or A.S. degree. This group was followed through the end of the Fall 1986 semester.

  Results indicated that students who enrolled in SLS 1101, College Survival, were more likely to be enrolled in college one year later and have a first-semester GPA higher than 2.0, compared to those who did not take the course.

This research report, *Addressing Retention Through An Orientation Course: Results from a North Campus Study*, was completed by Marcia Belcher, Scott Ingold, and Max Lombard. A copy is available from:

Office of Institutional Research
Miami-Dade Community College
11011 Southwest 104th St.
Miami, FL 33176

- In a study done at Sacramento City College, students were matched from three groups: those enrolled in College Success (an extended orientation course), those who attended a 3-hour New Student Orientation, and those who attended a 1-hour information session.

  > When comparing the academic performance and persistence of students who took College Success with those in the other two groups, the study showed that CS students completed more semester units of credit, earned a higher GPA, and had a lower drop-out rate.

  This research, entitled *Student Persistence and Achievement: An Evaluation of the Effects of an Extended Orientation Course,* was completed by Dr. Ed Stupka under a grant from the Northern California Cooperative Institutional Research Group. A copy can be ordered from him at:

  Counseling Center
  Sacramento City College
  3835 Freeport Blvd.
  Sacramento, CA 95822

- The University of South Carolina offers a well-known extended orientation program called University 101. Formal evaluation has been conducted since its beginning. Retention rates of freshman have been a principal focus in evaluating the success of this program. A research summary, revised in January of 1984, compared participants with non-participants:

  > "In general, freshman who participated in University 101 had a higher probability of returning for the sophomore year."

This report was prepared by:
Dr. Paul Fidler
Assistant Vice President
University Career Center
University of South Carolina
Columbia, SC 29208

- Each year, in a continuing tracking study of University of South Carolina freshman, we find conclusive evidence that freshmen who take University 101 tend to exceed their predicted grade point ratio (GPR) and to survive their freshman year (i.e., return for the sophomore year) at a greater rate than freshmen who do not take the course.
  From an article by:
  Jerome Jewler
  "Who we are, what we do, what we've accomplished."
  Factbook: University 101, The Freshman Seminar, University of South Carolina, 1987, page 3.

- In 1984, 2623 institutions were asked by the American Council on Education Survey, *Campus Trends*, whether or not they offered a course in "coping with college." 77.8% surveyed indicated that they did offer such a course.
  From the research report prepared by:
  John Gardner
  "The Freshman Year Experience"
  College and University
  Summer 1986, pages 261-274.

- Numerous colleges and universities have studied the effects of their orientation courses on student performance. Successful outcomes have been reported by many. For the names of the schools nearest to you or most like your institution, call or write College Survival, Inc.

Here are other **publications** you may find useful.

- *College Student Attrition and Retention.* Leonard Ramist, College Board Publication Orders, Princeton, NJ, 1981.
- "Effectiveness of an orientation and counseling program for adult evening students at Drake University." R.S. McCannon, (Doctoral Dissertation, Iowa State University, 1973). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 34, 6933-6934A. 1974.
- "Evaluating the impact of freshmen orientation on student persistence and academic performance." S.W. Jones, AR: Phillips County Community College. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 241 089) 1984.
- "The freshman seminar course: Helping students succeed." *Journal of College Student Personnel*, Virginia Gordon and Thomas Grites, July 1984.
- *Increasing Student Retention.* Lee Noel, Randi Levitz, and Diana Saluri, Jossey-Bass, Inc., San Francisco, CA, 1987.
- *Recruitment and Retention*
  Magna Publishing
  2718 Dryden Drive
  Madison, WI 53704-3006
  A newsletter published monthly since January 1987. The cost of a one-year subscription is $169.00.
- *Reducing the Dropout Rate (A Quarterly Source Book).* New Directions Subscriptions, Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, San Francisco, CA
- *Retention and Attrition, Evidence for Action and Research.* Oscar T. Lenning and Ken Sauer,

Publications Department, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Boulder, CO, 1980.

- *Student Retention Strategies.* Oscar T. Lenning, Ken Sauer, and Philip E. Beal, American Association for Higher Education, Washington, DC, 1980.
- *What Works in Student Retention.* Philip E. Beal and Lee Noel, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Boulder, CO, 1980.

Larry M. David is Vice President of College Survival, Inc. and a contributing editor of ***Becoming a Master Student,*** a student success course textbook by David B. Ellis.

College Survival, Inc. provides consultation and materials for establishing and improving student success courses.

For information, write **College Survival, Inc.,** 2650 Jackson Blvd., Rapid City, SD 57702-3474. Or call toll free 1-800-528-8323 (Outside US or in SD, call 605-341-3901.)

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Rapid City, SD 57702-3474